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SUBJECT: Trains Resume, Conditions Improve for Stranded Guangzhou Travelers

(U) This document is sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Conditions for Guangzhou's stranded rail passengers have generally improved as many trains resumed service in the last 24 hours and rain stopped. Onsite police and government workers appeared better rested and calmer in the face of continuing large crowds, with no new reports of disorder. Media reported many travelers returning train tickets and canceling travel plans. However, some migrant workers told Congenoffs they will return home at all costs. Travelers and volunteer workers complained of ineffective instructions and inaccurate information for those who still plan to travel home. End summary.

Trains Start Moving; Guangzhou Weather Improves  
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¶2. (U) Trains are moving again from Guangzhou's main train station to northern destinations, and stranded passengers who continue to wait seemed generally optimistic they would be able to board a departing train. One report said as many as 79 trains resumed service on January 30, with another report predicting as many as 120 trains leaving today. Despite Guangzhou Railway Group estimates of 600,000 passengers remaining stranded in the city, the company said it can facilitate all departures within three days.

¶3. (SBU) Media reported 60,000 stranded train passengers continued to wait outside Railway Station Square in the early morning of January 31. Weather conditions have improved as rain stopped, but temperatures remained low. People gathered in a large bus parking lot next to the square, waiting for information and seeking entry to the station. Train station entrances are still blocked by police, who appeared more at ease and better rested than in the previous two days. People's Armed Police (PAP) were still visible outside the station, but their role seemed to have diminished in the last 24 hours compared to regular public security and traffic police forces.

More People Change Plans; Most Still Insist On Traveling  
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¶4. (SBU) One group of middle-class travelers told Congenoff they had stayed at inexpensive hotels for 3 days before finally giving up on their travel plans today. News reports said 440,000 ticket refunds were issued in Guangdong Province by late yesterday, but most working-class travelers we spoke to said they would not be dissuaded from traveling home this holiday season. Congenoffs noticed that police were no longer seeking to persuade crowds or individuals, instead focusing their efforts on single women traveling with small children and others who might face exceptional hardships under current travel conditions.

15. (SBU) General lack of accurate information caused the greatest frustration among travelers and volunteer workers today. The government unexpectedly terminated free shuttle services from shelters to departing trains late yesterday, but neither travelers nor volunteer workers at the largest shelter seemed aware of changed procedures. When asked where or how to board trains, police officers and volunteers all said to go directly to the station but were unable to provide additional details. Outside the station, police were equally unhelpful, and crowds seemed to flow without direction between newly-erected fences and security barriers that police had installed overnight. Despite frustration and the lack of travel information, the atmosphere was still one of increased calm from previous days.

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